

have had dementia set in, and gradually have gone down hill, she said. She had one call at 4:30 a.m. to a woman's home. The woman said that if her dog blinked one eye, it indicated to her someone was trying to get into her home, which is why she called the police.

"When I arrived at her home she didn't recognize me," Green said. "Though I've dealt with her often, I've seen her out and about a lot, she didn't know who I was. So, I knew. When we see those situations, we contact Adult Protective Services and we go out and talk and see what the next step needs to be."

### IN THE FACE OF CRISIS

The ice storm that devastated Kentucky in January 2009 proved an enormous challenge for numerous agencies, especially in the hardest hit, western part of the state. Many towns were without power for days, if not weeks. Benton was without power for 13 days.

"We woke up to it," Watwood said. "We realized real quick that people didn't have food, didn't have gas. I understand that we only have 5,000 people, but when you have 5,000 hungry people, you have a problem."

Just like other communities across the state, Benton had no access to gas for emergency vehicles and they had to come up with generators to run major facilities. However, in addition, they had a large population of elderly citizens for whom power outages put more at stake than figuring out what they would eat. Many were on oxygen or needed dialysis and immediate relief from the chill that quickly began settling into homes.

"We had never experienced anything like that and we didn't have a plan, and that was our fault," Watwood said.

The department, along with other city entities, managed to get a shelter up and running within the first six or seven hours of the day. Then, officers began to go door to door checking on the elderly people they knew and heard about through word of mouth, he said.

"It was chaos, unorganized chaos," said Benton Fire Chief Harry Green. "All in all it worked out and we learned so much."

After that experience, Green created a special needs form that members of the community who have special needs can fill out. This lets the fire and police

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departments know exactly what the needs of their community members are and where they live in case of another disaster — regardless of its magnitude. They partnered with city utilities to print on everyone's utility bill that they were beginning this program and to contact the police department to obtain a form. Green tries to hand deliver all the requested forms, and offers to help them fill them out right there in their home, Watwood said.

A database was created to hold all the information on the forms, and Green is responsible for keeping the list up to date.

"Obviously, we're dealing with senior citizens, so about every three to six months, he'll go through the list and call the numbers and make sure people haven't moved into a nursing home or aren't deceased," Watwood explained.

In addition, the police department divided the city into seven sections, one for each officer, and they have their share of individuals on these forms with whom they are responsible for contacting and building a relationship. They know exactly where they live, what their needs are and what their resources are, including whether they have any family members close by to help take care of them in situations like the ice storm, he said.

"I'm so proud of the city I work for because in times like that we pull together," Watwood said. "Anything the elderly need around here, they get and that's the way it should be."

Eddyville faced similar challenges during the 2009 ice storm. In their small town, many officers had done the leg work in their communities, and were well aware of the extended needs of their seniors in such a crisis.

"Getting to know your community — that's the main thing," Eddyville's Jaime Green said. "You know who needs help,

who runs on oxygen, who's going to need assistance.

"When we had the ice storm, we knew which residents had oxygen and how much, Green continued. "We worked on getting them a generator or getting them somewhere where they could get the care they needed. That worked really well for us."

Eddyville was able to set up the elementary school as a type of hospital. Anyone who was on oxygen, bed bound or in a wheelchair was placed there. They had a doctor on hand 24-7, and registered nurses available. Once these people went back to the nursing homes, the police helped transport them back, Green said.

### DRIVING A THIN LINE

Among issues associated with policing an aging population, questions of one's ability to drive rises right to the top. Elderly driving is a topic that sits on the cusp of two important, yet potentially conflicting issues. If an individual's capabilities have waned to the point it impairs their ability to drive, they potentially can be a danger on the roadways, both to themselves and others with whom they share the road. There are numerous stories of seniors who have gotten in their car to drive somewhere, gotten confused and driven hours away from home, completely unaware of where they were or how they got there. Or worse, they run off the road and seriously injure or kill themselves.

However, most law enforcement officers realize that the ability to drive may be the only source of freedom seniors have left. Whether it's a grandmother driving to the beauty salon for her weekly appointment and social hour, or a couple heading out of town for a day of shopping, many seniors rely on driving as their only means to get out of the house for socializing or simply buying needed groceries. >>